

DHSS/DAC Planning Project

Name: Workforce Development

Defining the Issues:

Public health is what a society does to collectively “assure the conditions in which people can be healthy”. A competent and experienced workforce with the highest level of knowledge and functioning is imperative to achieve statewide, as well as public and personal health goals. According to the American Public Health Association (APHA, 2006), the public health workforce in the U.S. is facing a decline in both numbers and resources available to support public health services. Additional contextual factors that will impact the public health workforce are implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, new national accreditation standards and state budget cuts that reduce the size of public health agencies that are the backbone of state public health systems. Essential Service Eight of the 10 Essential Public Health Services focuses on the *assurance of a competent public health and personal health care workforce*. Activities to actualize this service area include:

Training

There are few resources available for training, particularly for those who have been in the field for sometime. There is a need to establish and maintain over time some expectations around core competencies in public health and develop training that helps people achieve those competencies. In addition, there are few opportunities to learn about current or evolving practices in public health that could be useful to those working in the field. Some of the key training questions include:

1. How do you orient and train a new employee?
 - a. Is there consistency in training across agencies?
2. What are the basic skills we want them to have to serve as a starting point upon which to grow?
3. How does a network of governmental public health agencies provide vibrant, timely and relevant training that meets the wide-ranging needs of the agencies involved?
4. How do we keep staff up-to-date on emerging ideas/diseases? There is a need to define and distinguish between what is required vs. what is “nice to have”.

Competition for Labor

There are challenges both in the retention and recruitment of labor. Many of these issues revolve around understanding and capturing those available in the employment pool. According to the US Census there are over 1 million fewer people of working age in the Midwest now than there were a decade ago and projections show that there will likely be 1 million fewer adults of working age a decade from

now than there are now. The key workforce issue is how do governmental public health agencies effectively compete to hire and retain labor in an environment where labor can earn more in the private sector or in other industries?

- **Recruitment** – Competition for labor is high. There are high turnover rates in public health agencies and concerns about how agencies attract qualified and competent staff are important issues for many agencies. This is further complicated by competition for labor and the changing nature of the available workforce. It is becoming more diverse and specialized in their education. Some of the recruitment questions include:
 1. Defining the pathways to a career in public health? How do we develop relationships with schools and other agencies that can move people into the field?
 2. What can agencies do to make their positions more attractive to someone in the job market?
 3. Are institutions of higher education preparing to take position in public health?
 - a. How do we help these schools connect their curriculum to public health?
- **Retention** – The retention of employees is also an issue for many public health agencies. Wage pressures, opportunities for advancement and competition from other sectors are making it more difficult to keep high performing employees. Health agencies are challenged with figuring out how to create staff development and incentive packages that will make it easier for employees to choose to stay in governmental public health. Other related issues raised include:
 1. How do agencies assure knowledge transfer from staff leaving/retiring and new staff entering the public health workforce?
 2. The turnover rate in public health agencies is fairly high. How do we provide opportunities for advancement in place?
 3. What are the factors that affect whether a person stays or goes?
 4. Are jobs described consistently across agencies so that people understand whether an opportunity has potential for advancement?

Vision:

- Effective collaborations and partnerships at all levels of community and state
- Well trained, high functioning workforce that is passionate about their work
- Desirable career tracks in Public Health
- Strong academic-practice partnerships
- Diverse workforce that looks like the population they serve
- Salary to hire and maintain and qualified professionals
- Technology to support the workforce
- Workforce viewed as valuable to the community
- Improve transportation to increase access to care

Project Ideas:

Training

Key activities include:

1. Define basic skills for new employees.
2. Develop a consistent orientation and training for new employees
3. Assure Public Health staff is up-to-date on emerging ideas/diseases?
4. Develop a training ladder that defines what training is required vs. what is “nice to have” for each public health discipline.
5. Met with public health interagency task for on infrastructure to learn more about each other’s work. They have a workforce development orientation and several areas of overlap were identified.

Competition for Labor

Recruitment activities include:

1. Define a pathway to a career in public health.
2. Develop relationships with schools and other agencies that can move people into the field.
3. Better market Public Health positions to make them more attractive to someone in the job market.
4. Develop common job descriptions that contain core competencies that can be used across public health departments.
5. Increase awareness of public health as a career opportunity for students through internship programs, clinical rotations and job shadowing.
6. Develop more internship opportunities with LPHA’s so students can learn what public health is and hopefully stay in the field.

Retention Activities include:

1. Develop a way to transfer knowledge from staff leaving/retiring and new staff entering the public health workforce
2. Provide opportunities for advancement and a career ladder in public health.

Next Steps:

1. Explore collaboration with other workforce development efforts.
2. Identify ways to get more LPHA engagement in addressing workforce development issues.